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Blissymbolics
Communication
Foundation

✦ gathering
✦ dissemination
⊗ blissymbolics
x much, many

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BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION FOUNDATION

Introduction

The primary feature which distinguishes man from lower animals is his ability to communicate through symbolic forms -- written or spoken. Man needs to communicate in order to function in his society. An infant communicates his basic needs through crying and other forms of vocal activity. As the child gets older, he learns language behaviour as a means to manipulate his environment. Through language, he can ask questions about his environment and he can develop cognitive processes. His language provides a framework through which he perceives his world and it must develop in order that his concepts of his world develop.

The extreme importance of the role of speech in giving the child a sense of self-worth, in providing the ability to exercise control over his environment, in allowing him to take responsibility for his own learning and in making possible an appropriate educational programme has been widely recognized. The experience of those working with children who lack functional speech supports the view that lack of communicative ability limits

total development, the ability to learn to read, and the ability to sustain motivation in academic programmes.

The inability on the part of the child to question and to express ideas and feelings drastically reduces or perhaps even eliminates all hope for a valid assessment of academic capabilities and the application of appropriate educational programming.

Blissymbolics

Blissymbolics is a non-verbal, visual-graphic communication system based on pictographic and ideographic components set in various combinations. Blissymbolics in essence is an alternative medium to conventional orthography.

Commencing in 1942, while a refugee from Vienna in Shanghai, Charles K. Bliss developed a unique organization of symbols which has the capacity of communicating every aspect of human experience. The design of the symbols relates directly to their meaning rather than requiring the intermediate step of relating symbol to meaning through sound. Consequently, Blissymbolics is free from symbol-sound-meaning associations. The direct visual representation of meaning inherent in Blissymbolics frees it from the difficulties associated with the learning of languages in which word configurations bear no logical connections or relationship to the object they describe or the meaning they represent.

The underlying logic of the symbols allows symbol elements to be combined and recombined with other elements to form new concepts. Thus, a total communication system which represents meaning in a simple, direct way results from an organization of pictorial, ideographic and arbitrary symbols. The visual simplicity and directness of the symbols make them quickly and easily learned by children prior to gaining fluency in reading and spelling. The capabilities inherent in the symbols to be combined for new concepts, and to represent a range of meanings beyond the concreteness of pictures, make possible a vast communication potential within a limited physical space. Blissymbolics thus become particularly valuable to the non-speaking, physically-handicapped child with limited range of movement. They offer, as well, potential application for areas of exceptionality requiring a simplified, visual, concise, alternate communication medium.

Blissymbols –

Sometimes look like the things they represent:



house



car



man



woman



person



eye



legs

can depict relationships, feelings, actions:



before



after



happy



sad



upset



come



protect
(from roof
symbol)

can be combined:



school
(building for giving
knowledge, store-
house of the brain)



visitor
(person who
enters home)



father
(man who
protects)



mother
(woman who
protects)

have a range of meanings:



attractive, pretty,
handsome, cute



house, building,
structure



make-believe, pretend,
magic, false, unreal

History of Blissymbolics

The use of Blissymbolics as a medium for instruction of non-speaking children arose from an increasingly felt need in the Ontario Crippled Children's Centre in Toronto. After exploring whether an existing symbol system could fill, or be converted to fill, this need, an interdisciplinary team working in the Centre pioneered the use of Blissymbolics as a communication medium for non-speaking children in which children progress through several vocabulary levels, each providing wider and more refined communication. Engineering, linguistic and psychological studies have complemented the classroom programme, and an assessment and consultative service have been provided.

The success achieved, not only in teaching but also in general intellectual development through symbol construction, and the sharp increase in participation by and enjoyment of the child in the life about him, led to a rapid expansion of the number of centres adopting the use of the symbols. At the moment over 900 professionals in North America have received training in Blissymbolics.

The system will be used to facilitate communication between participants from different countries in the Handicapped Olympics to be held in Toronto in the summer of 1976. It is being used as the medium of computer visual telephone communication. Its use as a means for determining the learning ability of non-speaking and retarded has produced encouraging results. More accurate assessment of the children's learning style has allowed teachers to programme more appropriately for their students' educational needs. Finally, Blissymbolics is being introduced as a remedial reading aid. However, despite these preliminary applications, its potential use remains largely unexplored.

International Interest

The use of symbols as a substitute or supplement to speech is becoming international. Correspondence has been received from forty-four American States, ten Canadian provinces, as well as 18 countries including Australia, England, Israel, Italy, India, Japan, The Netherlands, Mexico, New Zealand, Rhodesia, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden and Switzerland. Though exact statistics are not

currently available as to the number of international programmes which have been initiated, documentation through the O.C.C.C. Educational Evaluation Study is providing detailed information on 157 persons ranging in age from 2 years, 9 months, to 40 years, in Canadian and American settings. Through this study preliminary information is being obtained on the multiply-handicapped child as well as the physically-handicapped. An additional research study under the direction of Dr. Harry Silverman and funded by the Ministry of Education is exploring the feasibility of symbols with autistic children.

Continuous growth in the requests for instructor training, teaching materials, and consultation, along with projected future required services, made apparent the need for a new structure. The Blissymbolics Communication Foundation was established July 4, 1975.

The Blissymbolics Communication Foundation --
Long-Term Objectives

- to promote, disseminate and encourage the use of Blissymbolics throughout the world as a vehicle of communication for verbally-handicapped children and other persons who might benefit from such a communication system.

- to serve as a clearing house for standardization of symbols and their use.
- to provide training in Blissymbolics.
- to provide consultant services for the implementation of symbol programmes.
- to develop, produce and disseminate materials for symbol programmes.
- to assist in the direction of research related to symbol communication.
- to facilitate and promote the exchange of information concerning symbol communication.

It is proposed that, throughout 1976 and 1977, the Foundation will focus its attention on development of organization and structure. This will include membership building, the establishment of advisory bodies, the licensing of resource centres across the country. (Licensing, as all other aspects of the programme, is non-profit.) Exercise of copyright is employed to ensure uniformity in symbol use. This is important as the system moves into new languages and countries, if the aim of a standardized communication system is to be

achieved. It is intended that, by the end of 1977, at least 13 resource centres will be operating across North America and others in other countries to assist and advise local groups giving instruction. Information and teaching materials are being developed as resources permit.

Development and maintenance of a standardized symbol vocabulary has become possible through a perpetual, world-wide licence granted to the Foundation by Charles K. Bliss and through Mr. Bliss' involvement as a formal consultant to the Foundation.

Specific Ongoing Programmes and Services

The following specific programmes and services are presently being provided by the Foundation in accordance with its objectives: instructor training, consultant services with individuals and agencies working with symbols, the development of teaching aids and instructional materials, and the standardization of symbol vocabularies. Instructor training takes the form of Beginner and Advanced Workshops, a total of eight in 1976-77: four to be in Toronto and four in other locations. In 1977-78, ten Workshops will be held including an extended training course during the summer.

A major role of the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation is the provision of Consultant Services, in the areas of assessment, programming and research. It takes the form of presentations at Resource Centre Workshops, lectures, Conference presentations, training programmes at other Centres, and individual consultant services. It is anticipated that staff time devoted to this area will double over the two year period.

Sub-licences are being issued for the development of toys, books, workbooks, symbol trays and displays at the rate of six per year. The production of teaching aids, along with the development of instructional materials, and regular consultation with Charles K. Bliss, will encourage the standardization of symbols.

The instructional materials commissioned or initiated by the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation include, during 1976, a dictionary of symbols, 15 series of slides produced by the National Film Board of Canada, an audio-visual Workshop presentation series, and a Handbook for Parents, Teachers, and Administrators. During 1977, new

symbol vocabularies, a revised Syntax Supplement, a revised Teaching Guideline, and a Parent Guide will be completed.

In conjunction with O.C.C.C. Rehabilitation Engineering and with other engineering research organizations, research programmes are being directed toward the modification and refinement of existing electronic symbol displays and toward the development of a symbol printer, capable of producing a permanent print-out of symbols for the pre-reading child and compatible with already existing word-print-out technology. Contact will be made with agencies regarding the production of symbol displays to be distributed through the Foundation. Attention will be directed toward both individual symbol displays and toward group displays applicable to classroom, group residence and institution use.

Specific Future Activities

With respect to research, the Foundation will extend existing associations and initiate contact with other Federal and Provincial Ministries and Foundations to seek

funds for formally studying the application of symbols to other groups of exceptional individuals.

The Foundation will also submit papers to professional journals reporting the findings of current research studies.

In order to extend the resources and services of the Blissymbolics Communication Foundation the staff will gradually be increased at specified points in time so that at the end of the two-year period the staff complement will include an Executive Director, a Programme Director, an Associate Programme Director, a Consultant, an Administrative Assistant, a Senior Secretary, and two junior office clerks.

Symbol Materials Presently Available

1. Symbol vocabularies with 100 symbols
200 symbols
400 symbols
2. Plans for prototype electronic display board with eight different control switches
3. Symbol Secrets - a book containing Bliss symbols and designed to acquaint speaking children with non-verbal physically handicapped children
4. Teaching Guideline
5. Symbol Dictionary
6. Symbol Syntax Supplement #1
7. Newsletter for symbol instructors and symbol users

